



# [ Community Value of Public Interest Journalism ]

October 2020

**[PIJI]** Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative

# Community value of public interest journalism

Glenn Withers

This is a report of results of a survey commissioned by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative from Essential Media. Essential Media conduct a fortnightly omnibus survey, in which five questions relating to public interest journalism were included. This survey was conducted from 28 October - 1 November, 2020, and had 1,063 respondents (95% certainty for random sampling).

*The Essential Report - Public Interest Journalism Initiative* is Essential Media's report on its Qualtrics survey results. It is included in this document in its entirety.

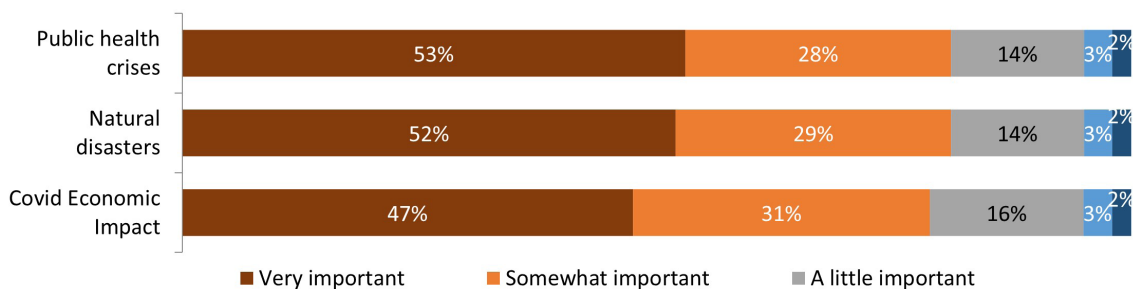
This report forms part of PIJI's ongoing work to understand how the community values public interest journalism, including surveys conducted at six-month intervals commencing from October 2019.

This survey continues to affirm the strong support from Australians for public interest journalism. That said, the events of 2020 are such that a confirmation again through a further survey when times are more settled would be helpful. This also would serve as providing time to explore in more depth the experience of 2020 and to look in detail through supporting focus group analysis at the motivations and explanations for all the driving forces and nuances behind the responses we observe.

## Key findings

1. Australians are **great users of media and this use has grown even further through 2020**, a year of great challenges, and across each type of media. By November 2020, 65% and 63% of Australians used commercial television and digital social media at least once daily, respectively, up from 55% and 47% in PIJI's October 2019 survey before the crises. Public broadcasting and hard copy or on-line media use rose too, to 55% for the former and 30% for the latter. (Report p.6).
2. The vast majority (78%) of Australians **hold public interest journalism as important or very important** for their media, though this is down from 86% in the first PIJI survey in October 2019. **The intensity of this support differed across Australia** being highest in Victoria (46% very important) and lowest in Western Australia (31% very important). (Report pp. 7, 8).
3. The majority of Australians indicate that they feel that the **nature of coverage across each of international, national, state/territory and local affairs is about right**, though a significant minority (29%) do see **local government and community affairs deserving of greater focus**. (Report, p.8).
4. In a year that has seen much turmoil for the Australian economy, **public willingness to pay tax in support of enhanced public interest journalism remained high** in this November 2020 survey. The community valuation in dollars was around the same level as measured in October 2019, but down from the peak of the crises in April 2020. As of November 2020, 44% would still pay at least an additional \$2.40 a year in tax and 34% would even pay an additional \$12 a year or more. (Report p.11).

*Importance of public interest journalism during crises.*



# The Essential Report – Public Interest Journalism Initiative

12 November 2020



# The Essential Report

**Date:** 12/11/2020

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**Prepared By:** Essential Research

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**Data Supplied by:**



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## AMSRS

Our researchers are members of the Australian Market and Social Research Society.



## About this poll

This report summarises the results of a fortnightly omnibus conducted by Essential Research with data provided by Qualtrics. This reports the findings of the third community survey 28th October 2020 to 1st November 2020 with 1,063 respondents.

Note that the second and third surveys were conducted during an international pandemic of COVID-19 (coronavirus) – as such some of the shifts may reflect participants' changed behaviour in response.

The methodology used to carry out this research is described in the appendix at the end of the report.

Note that due to rounding, not all tables necessarily total 100% and subtotals may also vary.



## Key Insights

### 1. Commercial TV/radio and digital social media are the most frequently consumed media

- Commercial tv/radio (65%, consume daily or more frequently) and digital social media (63%) are most frequently consumed media types.
- Men are more likely than women to say they consume any media except social media – for example 71% men and 60% women consume commercial TV/radio on a daily or more frequent basis but 61% and 65% respectively consume digital social media.

### 2. 18-34 year olds and Coalition voters are most likely to think there's the right amount of public interest journalism in any level of governance

- More than half of participants believe there is the right amount of public interest journalism into national affairs (64%), state/territory affairs (62%), local government affairs (54%) and international affairs (53%).
- 18-34 year olds and Coalition voters more likely to believe there is the right amount of public interest journalism in any level of governance, than 55+ and any other voter group. For example, 61% of Coalition voters say there's about the right amount of public interest journalism in international affairs – whereas 49% of all other voters say the same.
- 50% of non-capital residents say there's the right amount of public interest journalism into local government affairs, compared to 57% of capital city residents.
- Women are more likely than men to say there's the right amount of public interest journalism in international affairs (56% women compared to 49% men) and local government affairs (women 58% and 51% men).

### 3. One fifth of the public are willing to pay for a 50% increase in public interest journalism

- While 22% participants definitely would pay a tax increase at one of the price points they were shown, 24% would probably support an increase at one of the price points they were shown.
- As participants were only shown two price-points, this research cannot conclude whether those who definitely would pay both price-points (say \$1 and \$5) would also pay the next price (\$15). Likewise, whether those who wouldn't pay both shown prices also would not pay a lower price.

#### 4. Younger participants are less likely to say public interest journalism is important than those over 55

- 81% of participants say that public interest journalism is important during natural disasters, 80% said the same for public health crises and 78% say it's important in relation to economic crises.
- 18-34 year olds are less likely than their 55+ counterparts to say public interest journalism is important during any of the listed crises; such as 68% 18-34 year olds say it's very important during public health crises, compared to 89% of those over 55.

#### 5. The majority of people within each state and territory rate public interest journalism as important to Australian society

- 77% of participants rate public interest journalism as very or somewhat important, with the highest importance rating from New South Wales residents (80%), and lowest importance rating among South Australian residents (71%).
- 18-34 year olds are less likely to rate public interest journalism important than those over 55 years old (70% compared to 82%).

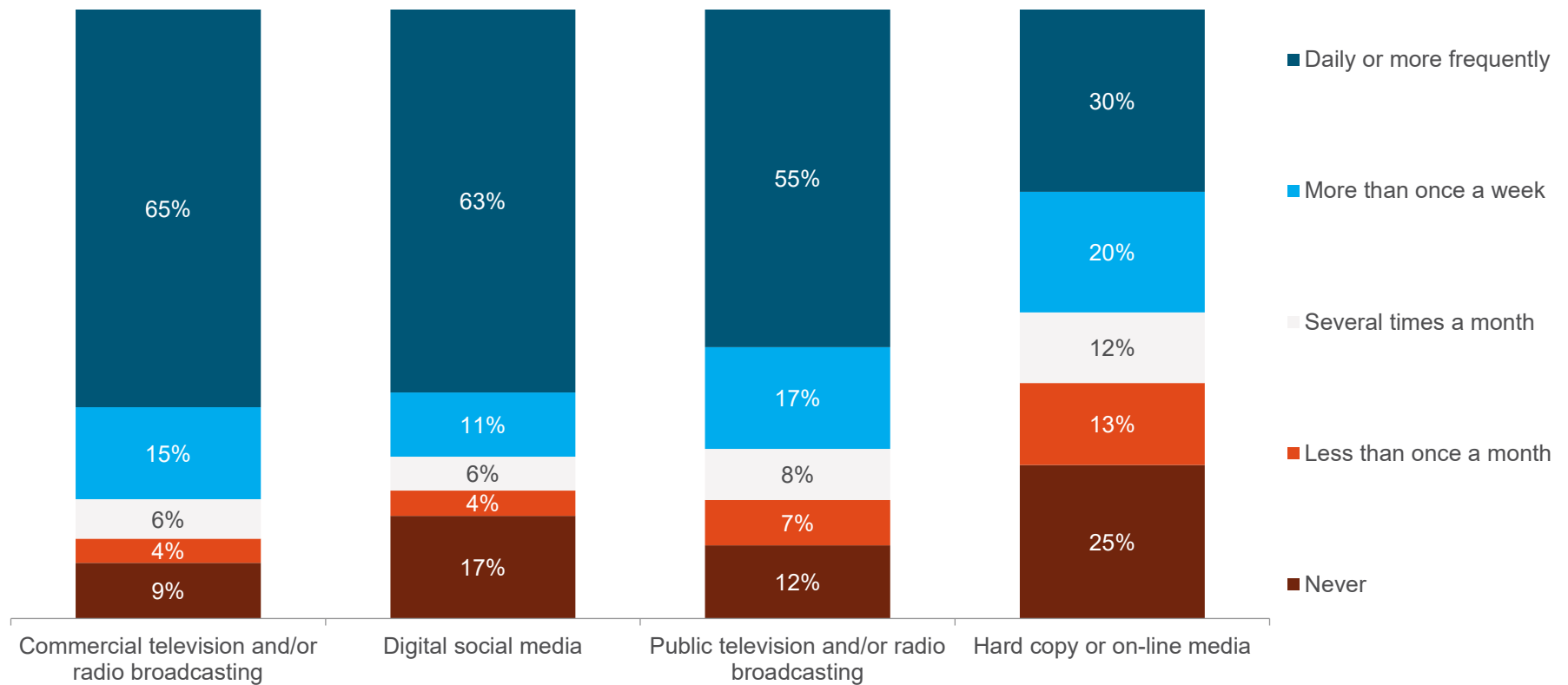




## Frequency watch or read media

Q How frequently do you watch or read the following types of media?

Base: All participants (n=1,063)

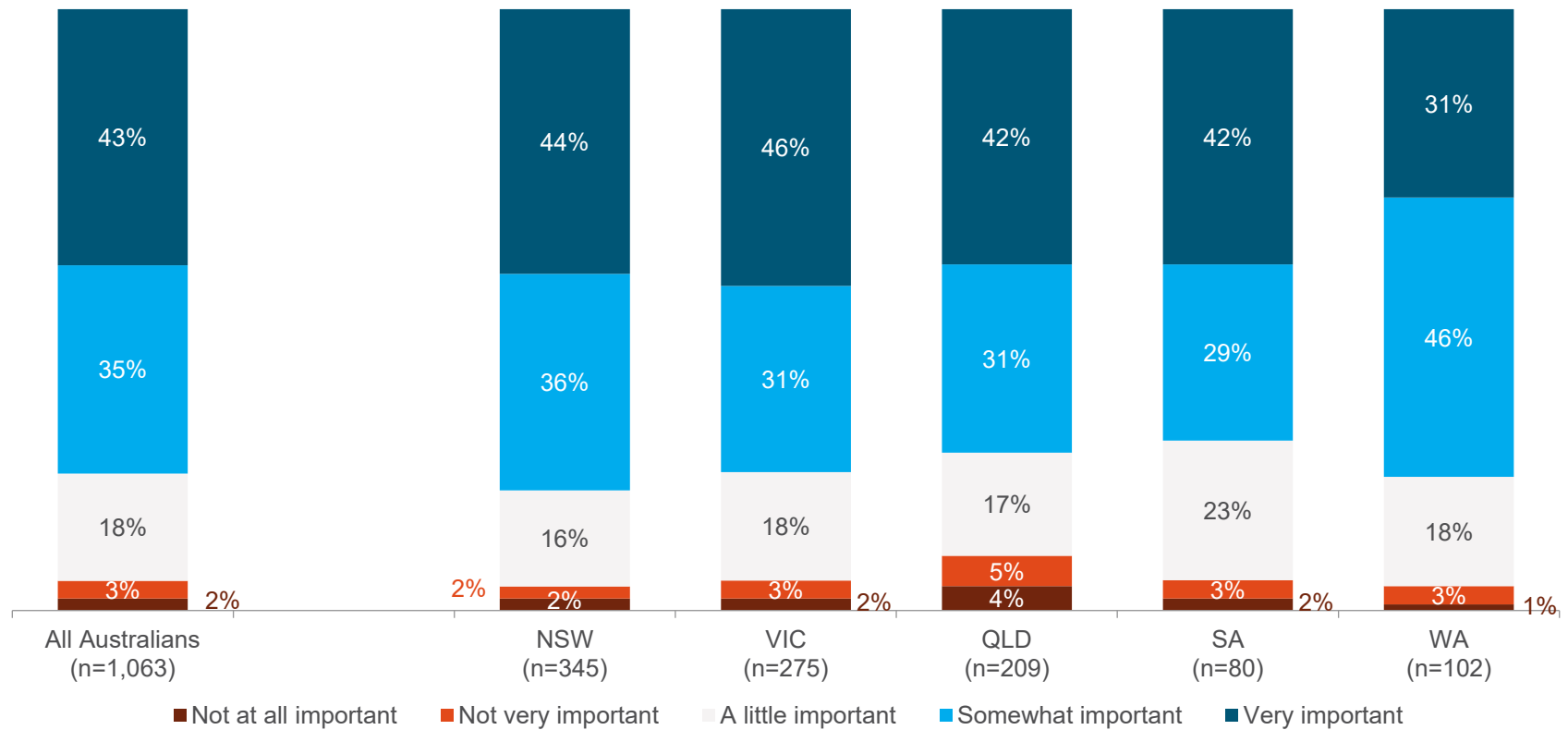


## Importance of public interest journalism to Australian society

Q **Public interest journalism** refers to the news and current affairs media or journalism which records, investigates and explains issues of public significance.

To what extent to you think that public interest journalism is important or not important to Australian society?

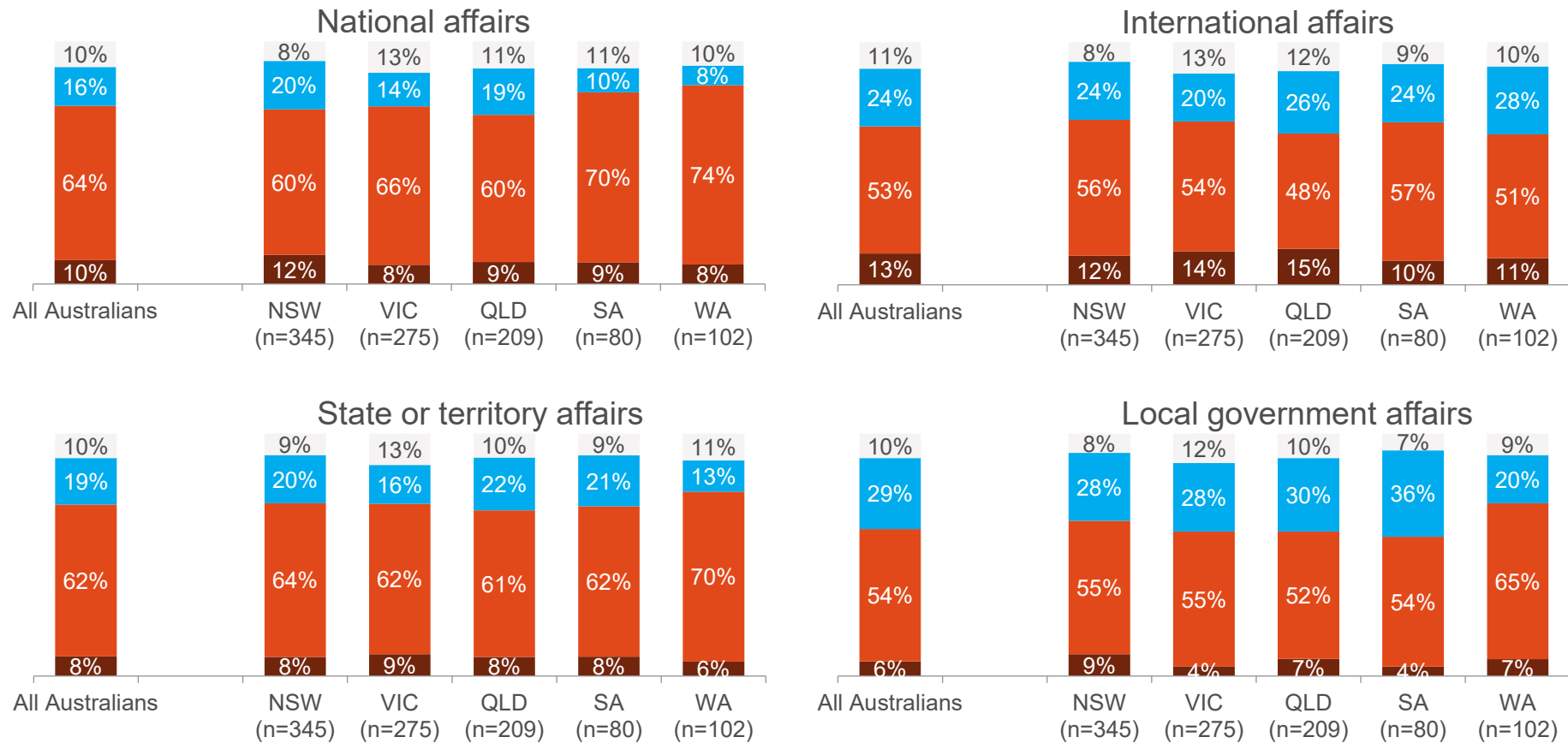
Base: All participants (n=1,063)



## Sufficient public interest journalism at various levels

Q Do you think there is enough public interest journalism reporting in the following areas?

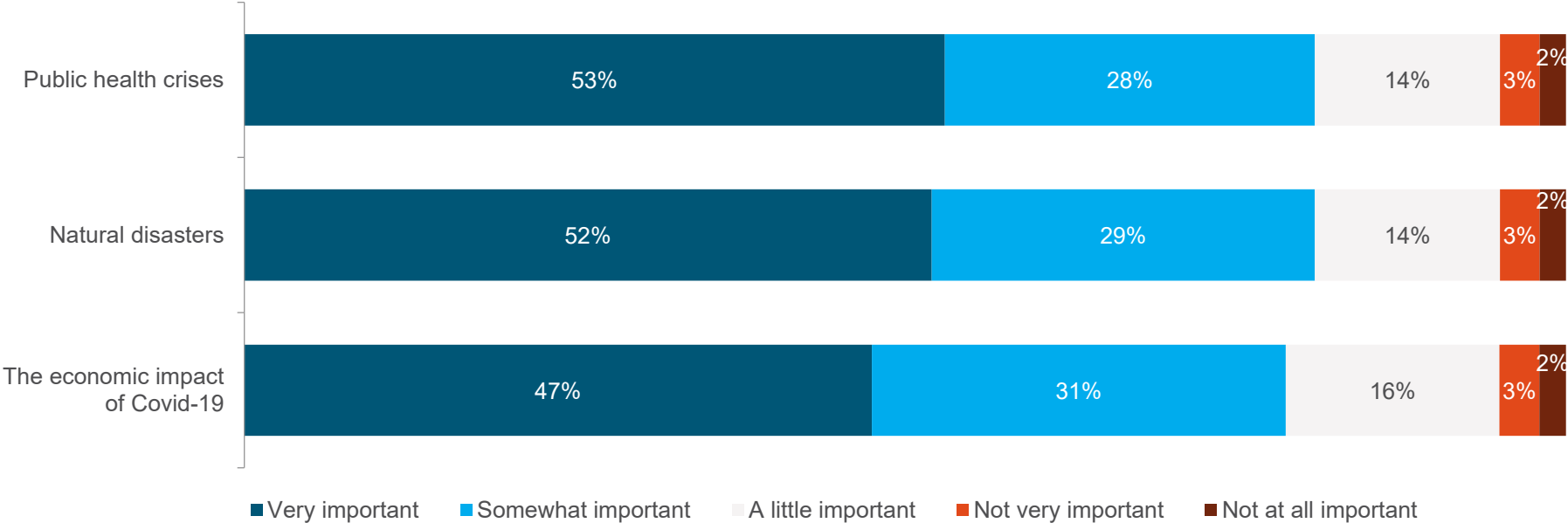
Base: All participants (n=1,063)



# Importance of public interest journalism during crises

Q How important is the role of public interest journalism when reporting during the following recent crises and challenges for Australia?

Base: All participants (n=1,063)



## Overall willingness to pay more in tax – Willingness to pay for all values shown to participants

In order to gauge possible public willingness to pay more tax to fund public interest journalism, it was suggested to participants that the government could increase the amount of public interest journalism by 50 per cent for a randomly assigned price (\$0.20, \$1, \$5 or \$15) monthly or annually.

If the participant said they 'definitely would pay' that tax increase, they would be asked the same question with a higher price (\$1, \$5, \$15, \$40). If the participant said any other option, they were shown a lower price (free, \$0.20, \$1, \$5) instead.

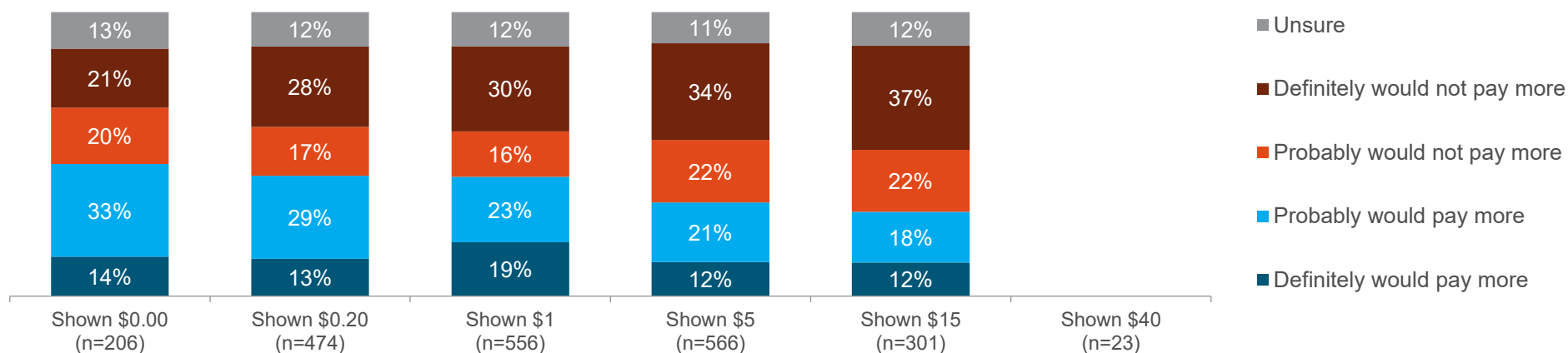
*For example, the first price a participant is shown is \$5 and they 'probably would pay more' tax at that amount. At the next question they are asked if they would pay a \$1 tax increase.*

The chart below shows the number of participants who were shown that value (either first or second) and the proportion who would pay that value increase.

*\*Please note that \$40 option is not shown due to small sample size (n=23).*

Q To what extent would you be willing to pay <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you be willing to pay more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?

*Base: All participants first and second value (n=2,126)*

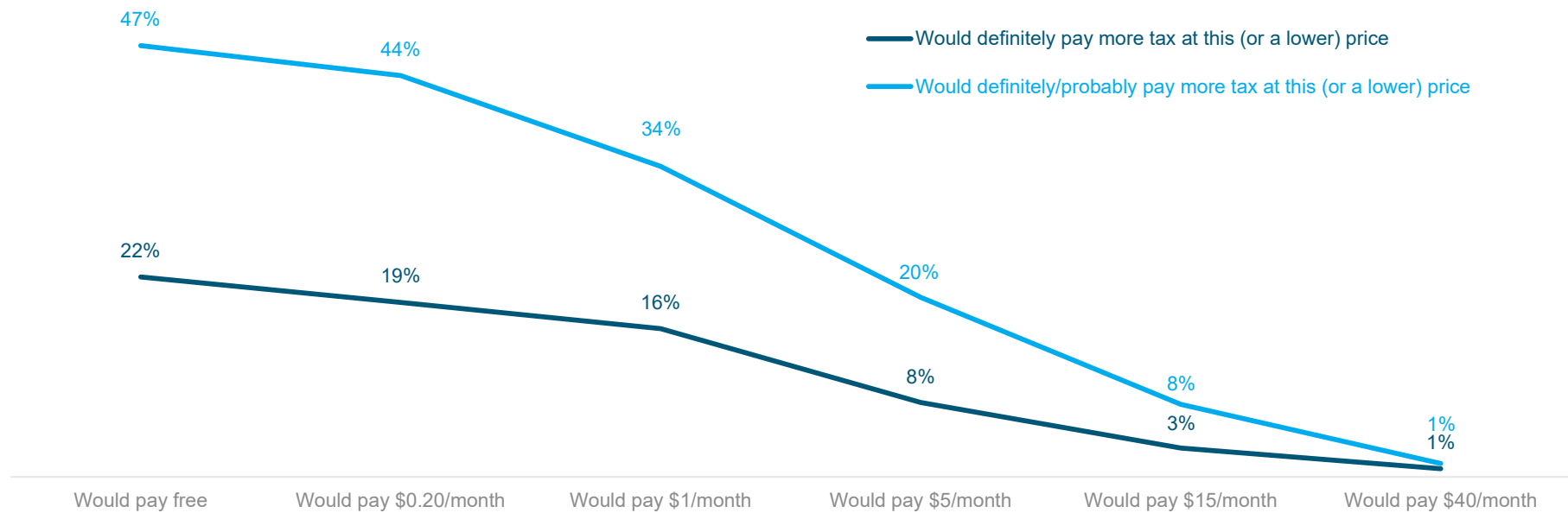


## Overall willingness to pay more in tax – Cumulative willingness to pay tax increase

The chart below shows the proportion of participants who (definitely or probably) would pay more tax and definitely would pay more tax for public interest journalism out of the overall sample. For the purpose of this chart we have assumed that someone who would pay a \$5/month tax increase, would also support \$0.20, \$0.50 and \$1 increases. Participants who definitely would not pay either price points they were shown comprise the remaining 78% of the sample (53% would probably not pay both price points shown or answered don't know).

Q To what extent would you be willing to pay <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you be willing to pay more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?

Base: All participants (n=1,063)

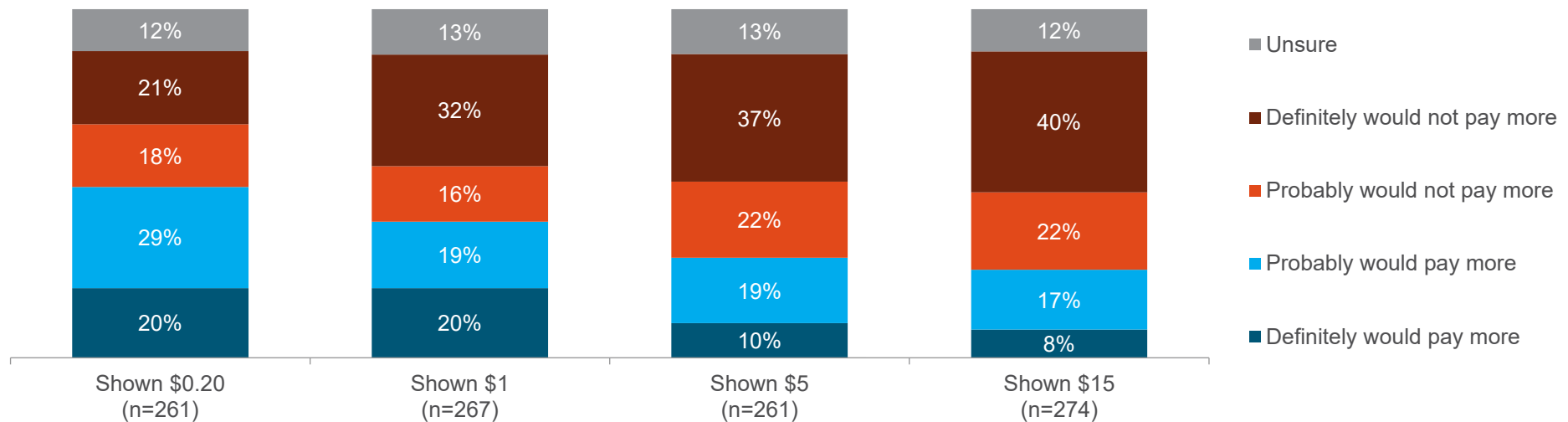


## Overall willingness to pay more in tax – First price point shown

The chart below shows the proportion of participants who definitely would pay more, probably would pay more, probably would not pay more, definitely would not pay more, or are unsure if they would pay more tax for public interest journalism out of the overall sample. The first price point shown to participants was randomly generated with the intent that an even proportion of participants were shown each of the four price points across the entire sample.

Q To what extent would you be willing to pay <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you be willing to pay more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?

Base: All participants (n=1,063)



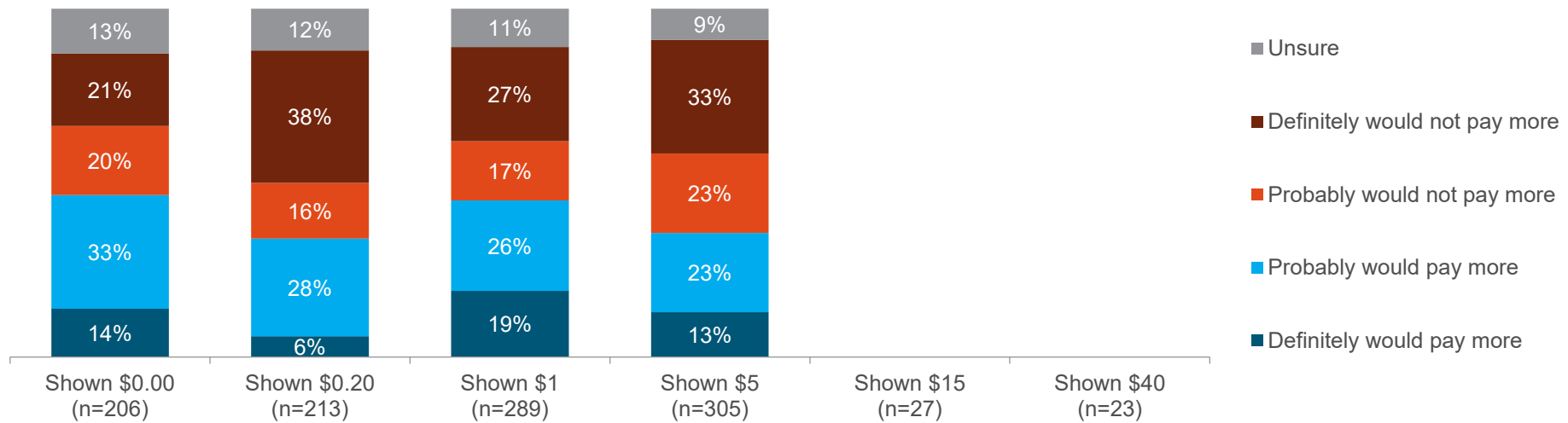
## Overall willingness to pay more in tax – Second price point shown

The chart below shows the willingness to pay more tax for public interest journalism out of the overall sample. The second price point was determined by their response to the first price point – if they 'definitely would pay' the first price point, the second price point was higher. If they selected anything other than 'definitely would pay', the second price point was lower than the first.

*\*Please note that \$15 and \$40 option are not shown due to small sample size (n=27 and n=23 respectively)*

Q To what extent would you be willing to pay <\$X1> per month in tax for increased public interest journalism? / And to what extent would you be willing to pay more for public interest journalism – if it increased the amount of tax you pay by <\$Y1> per month (<\$Y2> per year)?

Base: All participants (n=1,063)



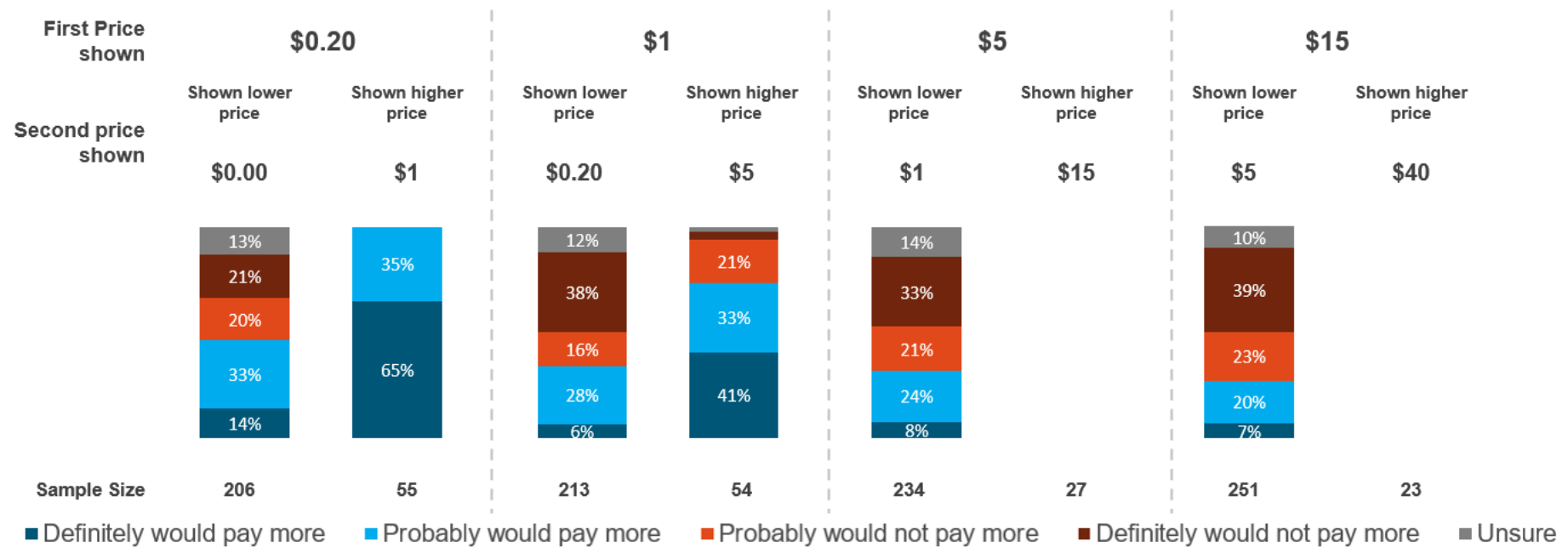


## Appendix: Overall willingness to pay more in tax – First and second price point differences

The first chart below shows the proportion of participants who ‘would pay’ the tax increase at the first price they saw. The second chart shows the number of participants who were shown a higher or lower price point (based on their response to the first question) and the proportion who would/not definitely support a tax increase at this second price point.

Base: All participants (n=1,063)

\*Please note that \$15 and \$40 option are not shown due to small sample size (n=27 and n=23 respectively)



## Appendix: Household income definitions\*

TOTAL: Lower Income	Up to \$51,999 per year Total of all wages/salaries, government benefits, pensions, allowances and other income that your household usually receives (GROSS – before tax and superannuation deductions)
TOTAL: Mid Income	\$52,000 to \$103,999 per year Total of all wages/salaries, government benefits, pensions, allowances and other income that your household usually receives (GROSS – before tax and superannuation deductions)
TOTAL: High Income	More than \$104,000 per year Total of all wages/salaries, government benefits, pensions, allowances and other income that your household usually receives (GROSS – before tax and superannuation deductions)

## Appendix: Methodology, margin of error and professional standards

The data gathered for this report is gathered from a fortnightly online omnibus conducted by Qualtrics.

Every two weeks, the team at Essential considers issues that are topical, and a series of questions are devised to put to the Australian public. Some questions are repeated regularly (such as political preference and leadership approval), while others are unique to each week and reflect current media and social issues.

The response rate varies each week, but usually delivers 1000+ interviews. In theory, with a sample of this size, there is 95 per cent certainty that the results are within 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire population had been polled. However, this assumes random sampling, which, because of non-response and less than 100% population coverage cannot be achieved in practice. Furthermore, there are other possible sources of error in all polls including question wording and question order, interviewer bias (for telephone and face-to-face polls), response errors and weighting.

The online omnibus is live from the Wednesday night and closed on the following Sunday. Incentives are offered to participants. Essential Research uses the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyse the data. The data is weighted against Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data.

All Essential Research staff hold Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS) membership and are bound by professional codes of behaviour.



The **Public Interest Journalism Initiative** Ltd is a non-partisan, philanthropically funded, not-for-profit body established as a limited-life initiative (3-5 years) to conduct research, develop policy and promote public discussion to ensure a sustainable ecosystem of independent, pluralistic, public interest journalism in Australia. PIJI was established in 2019 after consultations with publishers, editors, philanthropists, business leaders, policy-makers and researchers, and is governed by a board of highly-credentialed voluntary directors across the disciplines of media, law, public policy, research, philanthropy and business. PIJI supports informed debate with credible research, and works independently and collaboratively to develop rigorous public policy options.

PIJI operates as a Major Research Project of the newDemocracy Foundation.

**Glenn Withers AO** is a Professor of Economics in the Research School of Economics, Australian National University and UNSW Canberra. He is Immediate Past President of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, co-managing director of the consulting firms Applied Economics Pty Ltd and Social Cyber Group, and Board Chair of education company Blended Learning International Pty Ltd. He is also Board Chair of World Bank affiliate, the Global Development Learning Network. He is a member of PIJI's Expert Research Panel and is lead adviser on the Community Value Survey project for PIJI.

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